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Old Bridge-owned land tests positive for lead

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OLD BRIDGE: Testtag on township-owned land eyed for preservation shows "unusually high lead levels," prompting officials to take measures to limit potential exposure to the public.

"While this is certainly nothing for residents to panic about, it is something that I want to ensure everyone is being given our full and immediate attention," Phillips said.

Additional testing is planned to determine the extent of the

problem at the roughly 20-acre parcel along Margaret's Creek in Laurence Harbor. Phillips said steps have been taken to better restrict access to the site, while the township is working with county health officials and asking authorities to locate those responsible for the contamination.

Phillips said fencing along Route 35 has long restricted area use and illegal dumping. But now, the township is cutting off access from the beach along Raritan Bay by installing more fencing and additional

signs.

A portion of the property is used by the Municipal Utilities Authority for a sewer-connect system.

Data assembled last week by the state Department of Environmental Protection shows "fairly substantial levels" of lead contamination in certain spots where a number of what appear to be car-battery casings were discovered, said Ed Putnam, assistant director of the DEP's site-remediation program. Putnam said the levels are high for normal soil yet con-

sistent with other areas where battery casings are found.

The DEP began testtag because of discussions about the property possibly being purchased with state Green Acres funding, Putnam said.

Putnam said the results "certainly puts (preservation) on hold."

More testing will eventually be done to determine the extent of the contamination and to put a remediation plan in place, Putnam said.

"Right now we're concerned with people inadvertently getting into the area and being exposed," Putnam said.

The township acquired the marsh-surrounded land area — between Raritan Bay and Route 35 — in 1997 through foreclosure due to unpaid taxes. Phillips said the property was used as an industrial fill site decades ago.

Phillips said there is no record of the township testing the property for lead during its acquisition in 1997.

Putnam said exposure on the site could come through lead-contaminated dust.

A highly toxic chemical, lead was used for many years in products in and around homes, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Children 6 years old and younger are most at risk. Lead can cause a wide range of health effects, from behavioral problems and learning disabilities to seizures and death, according to the EPA.

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